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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

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RUEHZU/ASIAN PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 000420

SIPDIS

FOR EAP

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TAGS: KTIA ASEAN JA CH

SUBJECT: MOFA SUPPORTING BROAD ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Classified By: CDA James P. Zumwalt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Japanese officials want to strengthen cooperation with the United States on Southeast Asia policy and enthusiastically welcome what they see as renewed U.S. engagement in the region. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) welcomed Secretary Clinton's visit to Indonesia and the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat and, more specifically, her announcement that a review process for U.S. accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) has begun (Ref A). Understanding the level of U.S. dedication will make it easier for Tokyo to explore areas of joint cooperation and allows Japan to pursue its own policy initiatives with more confidence, MOFA indicated to Embassy Tokyo. MOFA's Southeast Asia Division has been busy this month managing key relationships in the region. Japan's Crown Prince completed a trip to Vietnam, and Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva used a Japan visit to give assurances of Thailand's political and economic stability. On Burma, Japanese officials are encouraged by UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari's latest trip and by his efforts to solicit Japanese help in dealing with the military junta.
END SUMMARY

MOFA PLEASED WITH SECRETARY'S VISITS

¶2. (C) First Southeast Asia Division Deputy Director Shogo Yoshitake told Embassy Tokyo February 19 that he and his MOFA colleagues were extremely pleased with the Secretary's visit to Indonesia and to the ASEAN Secretariat. This Southeast

Asia stop points to Washington's plans to bolster U.S. engagement in the region and -- to the relief and satisfaction of concerned regional capitals -- conveys a renewed, longterm commitment to Southeast Asia, Yoshitake stressed. Japanese officials, furthermore, applaud the Secretary's public announcement regarding Washington's decision to start the interagency review process for potential TAC accession. He expressed understanding regarding the lengthy procedural, legal, and policy coordination involved in assessing potential membership but underscored the important role that the announcement itself plays in dispelling any lingering perceptions of U.S. regional neglect.

¶3. (C) The Secretary's stop in Jakarta also helped to confirm the importance Washington places on Indonesia as the world's most populous Muslim country and as a critical policy player in the region, Yoshitake said. Indonesia is an original ASEAN member and current home to the Secretariat. There is room for broader U.S.-Japan cooperation on the world's largest archipelago in realms such as education, technical assistance, and counterterrorism, to name a few, noted Yoshitake.

¶4. (C) MOFA welcomes a greater U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, in part to balance what Japanese officials see as China's growing influence in the region, particularly the Mekong countries, Yoshitake continued. The Secretary's trip helps reinforce the image of the United States as a potential counter to China, which bases its policies only minimally on shared international interests, Yoshitake asserted. With Washington and Tokyo affirming their commitment to the

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region, the U.S. and Japan can jointly encourage China to become a responsible stakeholder and a constructive member in group-based orientations and regional mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

MOFA MANAGING KEY MEKONG TIES

¶5. (C) Clear signs of U.S. regional engagement also give Japan the confidence to explore its own policy initiatives, explained Yoshitake. Expounding on Japanese relations with Mekong capitals, Yoshitake provided a brief readout of Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito's February 9-15 trip to Vietnam. The Crown Prince had a formal lunch with the Vietnamese Vice President but also enjoyed two separate dinner occasions -- in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City -- with Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet. The Crown Prince has always expressed interest in Vietnamese culture and was warmly received. Yoshitake mentioned that the trip provided impetus to settle the official development assistance (ODA) bribery case involving the Japanese firm Pacific Consulting International and a top Ho Chi Minh City official. Japan wanted to resume its ODA program to Vietnam as quickly as possible. Yoshitake stressed that the key to limiting future scandals is transparency, but he admitted that he is only mildly confident about the effectiveness of future improvements.

¶6. (C) On Thailand, Japan was quite pleased with Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's February 5-7 visit to Japan and his meeting with Japanese PM Aso. Yoshitake explained that Thai prime ministers usually reserve their inaugural overseas visits for fellow ASEAN member countries, but the fact that Abhisit chose Japan as his second visit -- following Laos -- highlights the importance Bangkok places on its relationship with Tokyo. Abhisit arrived conveying the importance of bilateral ties and expressing gratitude for past Japanese support. His main objective, noted Yoshitake, was to pass along a message of stability and to restore Japanese investment confidence following the political uncertainty and

antigovernment demonstrations that led to the closure of Bangkok International Airport last year. Abhisit participated in an investment seminar where he underscored the importance of foreign direct investment and tourism, particularly during the current global financial crisis.

¶7. (C) Yoshitake said that Abhisit's visit tracked smoothly with Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone's January trip to Thailand, where his counterpart, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit, expressed the same message and highlighted the importance of transparent policies to avoid similar government disruptions. As the chair of ASEAN this year, Thailand has a large role to play in regional affairs, observed Yoshitake. Both Tokyo and Bangkok would like to hold the East Asia Summit and other related events, such as the ASEAN 3, as early as possible, but some participants have not yet agreed to the timeframe, according to Yoshitake.

¶8. (C) On Burma, UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari is turning to Japan for help in dealing with the Burmese military junta. Gambari stopped through Tokyo February 11-13 after having just visited Burma, where he met separately with detained Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, members of the National League for Democracy, and Prime Minister Thein Sein.

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Yoshitake said that Gambari's meetings with FM Nakasone, Deputy Foreign Minister Kenichiro Sasae, former Japanese Permanent Representative to the UN Kenzo Oshima, and representatives from the Japan International Cooperation Association were somewhat thin on substance but that Gambari asked Japan, as a new nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council, to back him in his efforts to push the military regime toward dialogue with the opposition. Gambari noted during his meetings that Ang Sung Suu Kyi is insisting on certain preconditions -- such as the release of all political prisoners -- before UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon visits the country. Gambari wants Japan to keep talks open with the junta in order to "move the situation forward." Gambari needs a "tool box," "carrots," and "new ideas" to make this happen, stressed Yoshitake.

ZUMWALT